

UPDATE

Basic Information About SARS

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus, called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). SARS was first reported in Asia in February 2003. Over the next few months, the illness spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. The SARS global outbreak of 2003 was contained; however, it is possible that the disease could re-emerge.

The SARS outbreak

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), during the SARS outbreak of February – July 2003, a total of 8,437 people worldwide became sick with SARS; of these, 813 died. In the United States, there were 192 cases of SARS among people, all of whom got better. Through July 2003, laboratory evidence of SARS-CoV infection had been detected in only eight U.S. cases. Most of the U.S. SARS cases were among travelers returning from other parts of the world with SARS. There were very few U.S. cases among close contacts of travelers, including health-care workers and family members. SARS did not spread more widely in the community in the United States.

Symptoms of SARS

In general, SARS begins with a high fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$]). Other symptoms may include headache, an overall feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also have mild respiratory symptoms at the outset. About 10 percent to 20 percent of patients have diarrhea. After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry cough. Most patients develop pneumonia.

How SARS spreads

The main way that SARS seems to spread is by close person-to-person contact. The virus that causes SARS is thought to be transmitted most readily by respiratory droplets (droplet spread) produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplet spread can happen when droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled a short distance (generally up to 3 feet) through the air and deposited on the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose, or eyes of persons who are nearby. The virus also can spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eye(s). In addition, it is possible that the SARS virus might spread more broadly through the air (airborne spread) or by other ways that are not now known.

Visit the World Health Organization website at <http://www.who.int/en/> to learn more about SARS and what prevention measures you can do to protect you and your family.



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